

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **2016-17 State Assessment Vendor Announcement**

- 1. Will the department assess liquidated damages from the state's 2015-16 assessment vendor, Measurement Inc.?**
  - The contract authorized the assessment of liquidated damages in the event of a breach.
  - The department is currently in settlement negotiations with the vendor and hopes to reach a resolution soon that is in the best interest of the state.
- 2. Has Measurement Inc. shipped all student test materials to the new scoring vendor?**
  - Measurement Inc. has transferred materials to our vendor for scoring, and Pearson has begun the scoring process.
- 3. How can the department ensure that the administration of the 2016-17 test goes smoothly?**
  - The department selected Questar after carefully vetting industry leaders that have experience administering tests at a large scale and developing a test on a timeline similar to Tennessee's.
  - We also have examined successful experiences in other states, speaking with references that the company provided and through independent investigation.
  - We worked closely with the state's Central Procurement Office to strengthen the language for the scope of work in the assessment contract. This includes but is not limited to providing specific **technical requirements** for the administration of both online and paper tests.
  - The department also has plans to rely on progressive proof points to ensure that the vendor and our schools are ready, as we will phase in online assessments over the next three years.
- 4. Is there enough time to build a quality test for this coming school year?**
  - Questar has proven that they can develop and administer a test on Tennessee's timeline. Last year in Mississippi, Questar started work on the contract on July 1 and administered a test to high school students on block schedule in late fall.
  - Test development requires that you are always working ahead, and therefore, our team started crafting next year's assessment earlier this spring.
  - The work our assessment design team has already completed will serve as a foundation for next year's assessment.

**5. How will the suspension of 3–8 testing last school year impact releasing test questions to teachers and parents?**

- Legislation passed by the General Assembly this spring requires the department to release as many test questions as possible to parents and teachers.
- This legislation anticipated the release of test questions to take place after the 2016-17 assessment administration; however, due to the suspension of grade 3–8 testing this spring and the need to field test and utilize copyrighted test questions, full implementation of this new test question release will not occur until after the 2017-18 assessment.

**6. Will the test be online or be paper and pencil next year?**

- The department is committed to moving to online testing in the future, but at a pace that is right for Tennessee.
- We believe that online assessments reinforce technology skills that the real world requires. However, we have to ensure that districts, schools, students, and our test vendor are ready for this transition.
- Moving forward, Tennessee will phase in online administration over multiple years to ensure both state and local technology readiness.
- For the upcoming school year, the state assessment for grades 3–8 will be administered via paper and pencil.
- However, the department will work closely with Questar to provide an online option for high school End of Course exams if both schools and the testing platform demonstrate early proof of successful online administration.
- Even if schools demonstrate readiness for online administration, districts will still have the option to choose paper and pencil assessments for their high school students.

**7. If the test is online next year, will the test features feel the same for students or will students have to learn to use something completely different?**

- It is important for students to become familiar with the testing environment, whether online or paper.
- While the online platform will be different because the vendor has changed, if districts choose to administer End of Course tests online, the digital test environment will include similar functions to the platform previously used.

**8. Will next year's test be a different type of test? Will it include similar types of questions to this year?**

- Similar to the design of the 2015-16 assessments, the 2016-17 state assessment will continue to feature multiple types of questions that measure the depth of our state academic standards, specifically students' problem solving and critical thinking skills.

**9. Are there any bigger implications with the U.S. Department of Education due to suspending grade 3–8 testing during the 2015-16 school year?**

- While the law requires annual state testing, we have found ourselves in an unusual and unique circumstance. As a result, the department has been in constant contact with the U.S. Department of Education to ensure that we are following federal law to the best of our ability.
- It's also important to remember that Tennessee students in grades 3–11 completed Part I of the state assessment in math, English language arts, and social studies, and high school students took their complete End of Course tests.

**10. When will high school End of Course scores be available to districts, schools, and families?**

- End of Course scores will be available to districts, high schools, and families this fall.
- Because all high school students were able to complete their End of Course assessment, high school students and educators will receive detailed information about their strengths and weaknesses on redesigned score reports.
- Because third through eighth graders were only able to complete Part I of the assessment, districts, schools and families will receive limited information on performance (for example, how many questions they got right, but not what that raw data means in terms of grade-level mastery).

**11. What process did you use to identify Questar?**

- After we terminated our contract with Measurement Inc. on April 27, the department began surveying the market, looking for vendors that have successfully administered large-scale assessments.
- Developing and administering large-scale assessments in both paper and online environments is a small market, and to date, only a handful of companies have done this well.
- After researching multiple vendors, the department determined that Questar's proven track record of both administering large-scale assessments and developing a test quickly made them the best fit for Tennessee.
- After determining that Questar was the best fit for our needs and, in collaboration with the state's Central Procurement Office, identifying the proper avenue to procure a new assessment in line with both our challenging time constraints and state and federal law, we reexamined our competitive RFP process from 2014. That examination revealed Questar as the vendor with the next highest score, which provided us with an avenue to move forward with urgency.
- A combination of our recent research on the market, coupled with the results of the previous competitive RFP process, makes Questar an ideal partner to build, administer, and score our statewide assessments for next school year.

**12. What other vendors did you consider for the 2016-17 year?**

- We reviewed capabilities of vendors in the industry in determining which vendors could potentially meet our needs.
- The department had conversations with multiple vendors, including Educational Testing Services (ETS), Data Recognition Corporation (DRC), Measured Progress, Pearson, ACT, and Houghton Mifflin.

**13. Why did Questar stand out?**

- Since the 2014 RFP, Questar has successfully administered large-scale assessments online in multiple states, gaining invaluable experience and proving their ability. The company has also bolstered its leadership team and strategically worked to become a leader in providing next generation assessment questions.
- The department has engaged with the vendor's references as well as independently reaching out to the other states that have contracted with Questar. Independently verifying the vendor's work was a priority throughout the vetting process.
- In addition, in April 2016, Questar successfully bid and won the contract to create the optional second-grade assessment that the department is launching in spring 2017.
- Questar currently develops and administers large-scale assessments for **four other states**: Indiana, Missouri, Mississippi, and New York.
  - They provide *both* paper and online tests in many of these states.
  - Questar has partnered with Indiana on End of Course exams for 14 years and with Missouri for five years.
- Questar administered the ELPA21 assessment for English Learners field test for 11 states and the operational ELPA21 test for four states.
- Questar has developed and administered a large-scale state assessment on a similar timeline before.
  - Last year in Mississippi, Questar began their contract in the spring and had a test in place for fall block schedule classes by late fall.
  - This year, Questar administered New York grade 3-8 assessments to more than 1.3 million students.
  - In total, during the 2015-16 school year, Questar scored more than 7 million items and delivered more than 16 million test-related material shipments.

**14. Has Questar ever administered a test to nearly 1 million students, equivalent to the number of students in Tennessee?**

- This past spring, Questar administered grade 3-8 assessments to approximately 1.3 million students in New York.

**15. How much money is the contract with Questar for? How does that compare to our previous contract with Measurement Inc.?**

- We anticipate the contract with Questar to have a maximum liability similar to the cost of the prior assessment contracts.
- This contract will include administration, scoring and reporting for ELA, math, social studies and science for grades 3-11. The contract will also include item and test development for ELA and math.
- While our assessment design teams began developing next year's assessment earlier this spring, Questar will collaborate with the department to develop the remainder.
- Another vendor, Educational Testing Services, will remain the vendor for test development for social studies and science.

**16. How long is this contract for?**

- The state's contract with Questar for grade 3-11 assessments will be for two years: the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years, with annual options to extend to up to five years.
- We are intentionally limiting the length of the contract so that we can evaluate performance and provide assurances to the state and our stakeholders that we have gotten this right.

**17. The first process identified a vendor that failed to deliver. Why should we rely on the second place vendor from the same process?**

- The competitive RFP process was not flawed; our vendor failed to deliver.
- The competitive RFP process was designed to identify the vendor with the best technical qualifications while also monitoring for price to be a good steward of taxpayer money.
- Measurement Inc. had both the highest technical score and the lowest cost bid during the competitive RFP process.
- However, the department has used our experience during the 2015-16 school year to hone our selection of this new vendor, looking specifically at experience administering a large-scale assessment through both paper and online administration and a proven track record developing a quality test on a short timeline.

**18. Is Questar equipped to administer a large-scale online assessment? How will you know if their online platform can handle it?**

- Questar has administered online assessments for nearly a decade, gradually increasing their scale of online assessments. During the 2015-16 school year, they administered 2.4 million online assessments.
- Our experiences during the most recent school year have only reiterated the importance of periodic capacity tests and scaling up online testing at a pace that is appropriate for districts and schools. Both will be a part of our approach to online testing in the future.